



THE BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL,

JANUARY 30, 1776.



1874

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PREACHED BEFORE THE
LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL

IN THE

ABBAY CHURCH OF WESTMINSTER,

ON TUESDAY JANUARY 30, 1776,

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED TO BE OBSERVED AS THE
DAY OF THE MARTYRDOM OF KING CHARLES I.

BY

K. Yorke
JAMES LORD BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.

L O N D O N,

PRINTED FOR B. WHITE, AT HORACE'S HEAD, IN FLEET STREET.

MDCCLXXVI.

Die Mercurii, 31^o Januarii, 1776.

ORDERED, by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, that the Thanks of this House be, and are hereby, given to the Lord Bishop of ST. DAVID's, for the Sermon by him preached before this House Yesterday, in the Abbey Church *Westminster*.—And he is hereby desired to cause the same to be forthwith printed and published.

ASHLEY COWPER,

Cler. Parliamentor.

S E R M O N, &c.

MATTHEW, CHAP. V. VER. 9.

*Blessed are the Peace-Makers, for they shall be called the
Children of God.*

THE sword of war unsheathed by the permission of Divine Providence is a calamity as grievous as any of those with which an offended Deity has exercised a sinful people. On an occasion recorded in sacred story, it being proposed to the sovereign of Judah (who, forgetful of the aid of heaven, had arrogantly numbered his subjects as his principal resource in danger,) to chuse between the three sore evils threatned as the punishment of his impiety, "Famine, War, or Pestilence," he preferred "falling into the hands of the Lord, because his mercies are great;" and, with the emphasis of sad experience, strongly deprecated being delivered "into the hands of man."

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This determination of the Royal Psalmist has received repeated evidence of its wisdom, from the fatal effects with which this unnatural state has been attended in every age and nation. The dreadful havock which follows in the train of pestilence and famine is seldom so extensive, of so long continuance, or so big with ruin to a country ; and, as it carries with it indisputable marks of it's being the single act of Providence, unabettèd by the provoking malice of our fellow-creatures ; reason and religion tend to enforce submission, hope, and fortitude on the unhappy sufferers, who know their Creator's perfect goodness, and the plausibility of his nature. But when the sword is once drawn, and the passions and interests of mankind direct its devastations, it rages uncontrollably, scatters misery and ruin far and near ; is seldom satiated but with the destruction of one of the contending parties ; and as it advances, enlists under its banner every diabolical and destructive quality of head or heart which can inflame and aggravate the common sufferings. Even when unhappy necessity appeals to it for the purpose of self-defence, or to assert the sacred privileges of our nature ; even on these interesting occasions, this last remedy should be " narrowly looked into, and well considered" before recourse is had to it ; as the event is doubtful, and the " beginning of strife is like the letting out of water." When most successful, while it reduces an adversary to reason, how does it embitter that satisfaction, by cutting the sinews of the triumphant country in the slaughter of
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its gallant citizens, and by the severe interruption it occasions to private and public prosperity.

But if this complicated affliction is made to prey upon the vitals of a country, tearing out its own bowels, without a prospect of amends by honourable or advantageous victories; if a man's foes are those of his own house; if every success is real loss; and even glory only heavier shame; what an accumulation of wretchedness attends its footsteps! And how long is it before the wounds are closed, and mutual harmony and confidence restored! Under this horrid form, every terror with which the instruments of its violence arm themselves, acquires a peculiar keenness. The animosities of civil discord are deeply tinged with a deadly poison. The most inhuman and desperate passions unite to destroy the beneficial powers of a government, confessed by all to be their parent and common nurse; and under whose fostering wing they have confided their nearest and dearest concerns.

How eminent a rank this blessed reign of Peace originally held in the ideas of our all-wise and kind Creator is manifest through all his works. Love was the active principle which provided so amply for our happiness at first. Harmony and order visibly maintain these blessings in the natural world. All his religious dispensations to us his creatures are beautified with the heavenly lineaments of grace and mercy. And that which he has conveyed to us by his beloved Son is peculiarly distin-

guished by this image of himself. One of his earliest declarations in the first summary our Saviour delivered of his doctrines, was this of my text, "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God:" that is, happy is the disposition, and prosperous will be the end, of those who, as genuine offspring of an indulgent heavenly parent, cultivate the love of peace.

It must be confessed, that such is the perverseness of our nature, that this prudent admonition is but too frequently disregarded. A foreign power jealous of its neighbour's welfare, perhaps smarting under the effects of former struggles, is restless for revenge, and thinks it justifiable to attack this envied rival. In such a case the law of self-defence obliges the attacked to have recourse to arms. It would be reproachable tameness, a blamable indifference, not vigorously to oppose the violence which attempts to deprive us of any of the blessings we derive from heaven.

The same fatal consequences will follow from civil discords, and the unhappy conduct which leads to them. An arbitrary tyrant has often occasioned great confusion amongst his subjects by cruelty, oppression, licentiousness, and extravagance. On the other hand, the corruptions and unruliness of a people have insulted the best formed government, subverted its foundation, and swept before them, like a torrent, that wise and necessary controul which keeps a multitude in due subordination and obedience to the established laws.

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Under evils of this gloomy cast every good citizen is bound to oppose, as far as he is able, such desperate designs ; to lay aside his own pursuits, to sacrifice his private ease and advantages to the dangerous encounters of the field, because enemies of this description can only be reduced to reason by a brave and vigorous exertion. Not called upon by such powerful motives, and in opposition to so gracious a system of faith and practice, shall we presume to loosen those ties of social love by which mankind is connected, and, without scruple or remorse, plunge our country into inextricable difficulties? The slightest view of the advantages of a state of peace, one would think, should be sufficient, abstracted from topicks of religion, to warn us against the snares of the abettors of confusion ; and yet, on some occasions, it is necessary to mention even the most obvious truths.

In this happy state, and under the equal government of wise and salutary laws, every virtue has an opportunity to display itself. Industry, and its hopeful progeny the various arts of manufacture and commerce, flourish in their respective courses ; open to themselves new channels ; are protected and promoted in every quarter of the globe ; and diffuse the comforts and conveniencies of life with that benevolent impartiality, which heightens their value and importance. As everyone is secure from danger of public interruption of this happiness, he freely ventures to enliven, to decorate, to improve that share of them which
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has fallen to his lot ; persuaded, that when his possession of them ceases, he may transmit them thus improved as kindred or friendship shall incline him. This sweet tranquillity unbroken is peculiarly favourable to the Muses ; who, happy in those retreats to which they withdraw from every scene which dissipates the thoughts, and ruffles the contemplative faculties of the soul, please themselves with works of fancy, or serious instruction ; and investigate every ingenious art, or useful discovery, which improves human life, or does honour to human nature. Under their influence, morals and religion, humanity and social wisdom, advance in growth and strength ; and national glory and prosperity are effectually provided for. The hostile invader, the cruel tyrant, the turbulent citizen, can never therefore be seen in any other light than as the bane of every society. As such they must be controuled, resisted, or repelled. For this purpose alone are arms a garb becoming of a Christian, or justifiable in the sight of God. All who have assumed them on other motives, whose restless and overbearing spirits delight in slaughter, and rejoice in spoil and conquest ; who, without a pang, can sacrifice hecatombs of fellow-creatures to their idols of ambition and revenge : instead of being dignified with the honourable titles of heroes, deserve to be considered as the plagues and scourges of mankind. Every conquest they have made, every country exposed to their devastations, every distress they have occasioned, instead of throwing splendor round their names in story,

or exciting our praise or admiration, deservedly expose them to the abhorrence of mankind, and condemn them to perpetual infamy.

The history of mankind displays, in lively colours, these several particulars in her instructive pages, to the advantage of all who mean to make the proper use of them. In the temperate moments of reflection, free from those impressions which, at their respective periods, influenced the minds of the principal leaders on these occasions, it is in our power to form a just opinion of their behaviour; to separate the honourable from the reproachful circumstances; to strip their actions of all false splendor; and to adapt our own, when occasion calls us forth, to those wiser maxims which we derive from their examples. Such a retrospect has always been encouraged by the authority of every well-regulated state. The faithful historians of such interesting events have met with merited rewards and honour; and their writings have been esteemed as admirable lessons of virtue and true policy. The wisdom of our legislature has adopted the same idea. And highly expedient is it, that we should frequently advert to the story of such contests between the sovereign and the subject; the ecclesiastical and civil branches of the state; foreign enemies and our country; in order to draw from the detail those salutary hints which may render us thankful for the good derived from them, and solicitously careful to avoid the evils which began or followed.

followed them. With this view it is that at stated periods we are directed piously and gratefully to acknowledge the many signal instances of the care of a good Providence, to preserve to us our civil and religious rights in purity and truth. And upon the same principle are the national infringements of divine and human laws appointed to be solemnly lamented and repented of.

Of each of these particulars is the interesting occasion of our present meeting composed. It partakes of the former, in as much as from the collision of contending parties (by the influence of that power which is ever watchful to turn even our faults to profit) great light was cast on the just limits of prerogative and freedom. From this struggle between the crown and people arose that fair system of temperate and mixed authority, which has so long contributed to render this country the envy and admiration of its neighbours. And, on the darker and more dishonourable part, various are the instances of guilt incurred on all sides; many the reasons for solemn humiliation and contrition; and sensibly affecting the motives for future caution against involving ourselves precipitately in similar crimes and distresses.

In canvassing this instructive and mortifying story, which has now for considerably above a century been variously treated of; why should we hesitate to confess in general, that by an ill-conducted education, and the then prevailing

prevailing opinions of divine hereditary right to rule, the royal breast had harboured sentiments incompatible with the liberal principles on which our constitution is founded; and which then began to disclose themselves, by the advancement of science, the extension of commerce, and the diffusion of property? Or that high-minded and imprudent counsellors abetted those false and dangerous notions; and, by many ill-^{ad}vised steps, quickened and exasperated the national fury and resentment? But then, on the other hand, it is as undeniable, that the glorious contention in the cause of legal freedom, which so honourably distinguishes the earlier heroes in this quarrel, and ranks them with the most celebrated patriots of Greece or Rome, too soon degenerated into faction, a dislike to the approved and ancient form of government, and the avowal of a narrow plan of policy, ill suited to the genius of this country, and adopted from prejudiced and interested views. In the unhappy progress of this contest, none appear exempt from blame. The Royalists thought any misrepresentation of characters or motives; any methods of promoting or supporting their designs; all acts of violence, were strictly consistent with their claims at that crisis, and proportioned to the insults they had met with. The advocates of the parliament, with reason on their side at first, and convinced of the justice of their appeal to arms, were too little open to proposals of satisfaction, and even concessions to their reasonable wishes; grew perhaps too jealous of the sincerity of the adversary,

and rose in their demands : and at length imperceptibly became the dupes of others more desperate and artful than themselves. Such observations occur immediately to every one who considers these events with the attention they deserve ; and on this account, as well as because so many others have gone before me in it, I shall not consider it as a part of my present duty, to dwell on so obnoxious and so delicate a question. I will rather direct your attention to the mischiefs which civil dissensions entail upon a nation, and the general doctrine which my text inculcates.

And here it seems not foreign to my subject, to expostulate a little with such as employ the sacred trust reposed in them of public teaching on matters so foreign to its first and great intention as political discussions. It encourages in the community at large a wanton disposition to meddle with points above the common reach, inconsistent with sober industry, and contented acquiescence in their stations. It contributes towards that idle curiosity which was so justly condemned in the degenerate sons of Athens, and which has ample food supplied to it by that inundation of groundless speculation and false intelligence with which the keenest appetite cannot but be cloyed. But if in almost any light this practice is scarce defensible, how much heavier must be the blame incurred, when the appointed preacher of christian peace and charity, converts that pleasing sound into a blast of discontent and discord ?

Seasons have indeed appeared, when it has been the peculiar office of the pulpit, to rouse its audience in defence of scriptural truths; or against the most notorious infractions of every valuable interest. And there have not been wanting many of our order, and, I trust, never will, who, in various methods consistent with their pious calling, have strenuously endeavoured to resist invasions of this kind. But surely the conduct of the irreverend and unhallowed teachers here alluded to is not to be vindicated on this truly patriot plea: of those, I mean, who profane this holy office of religious instruction to purposes of faction, and, by misunderstood or perverted passages of scripture, unjustifiable censure of legal and gentle rule, enthusiastic conceits of the advantages resulting from an equality of conditions and independency of all controul, maintain and vindicate the present unhappy dissensions between this kingdom and its hitherto dependent colonies; exciting the capricious and unruly tempers of an enraged multitude to deeds of persecution and cruelty. Would it not become them better to sow the seeds of reconciliation between discordant brethren: and, in the figurative language of scripture, promote the growth of that celebrated tree, whose rich fruit and fatness is described as employed in “honour both of God and man* :” which, for its beneficial uses, has emblematically been employed

* Judges ix. 9.

to furround the brows of the peace-makers ; and expresses so significantly the many advantages of peace ? Many are the topics which might be suggested to answer these laudable intentions. And, considering the variety of clashing opinions, all may occasionally be useful. Some are the natural result of serious meditation on the facts to which this anniversary directs our thoughts. Others offer themselves in variety of shapes, from the dictates of humanity and sound policy : still more may be added to their number, and no less to their importance, from the amiable and benevolent conduct of our Saviour and his immediate followers, and the charitable spirit of the Gospel.

Whatever may justifiably be urged in vindication of political contests on some occasions with a foreign enemy, it is our duty to inculcate sentiments of a contrary tendency ; to ascribe all contention to its proper source, the mischievous passions of mankind ; and to teach the people committed to our charge how to controul them. “ From whence come wars and fightings “ amongst you ? Come they not hence, even of your “ lusts that war in your members * ? ” It is our duty to endeavour to eradicate, from the breasts of our fellow-creatures, as many of those causes as our reason, improved by christian knowledge and charity, must reject ; and as much as possible to restrain the impe-

* James iv. 1.

triosity of military ardour to necessary self-defence; disclaiming all ambitious views of conquest and dominion; reminding the society of which we are members "to follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord *."

But doubly watchful should we be to discourage, in every order, the occasions of civil discord. In the course of God's afflictive providence, in a long succession of frail governors and headstrong subjects, every nation has at times drunk but too deeply of this deadly cup; and the annals of our own furnish melancholy memorials of the fatal effects of those bloody differences which deform so many pages of our history. At such periods the part which every one is called upon to act, seems one of those tests of virtue appointed for this time of trial. But it is certain that we never can be guilty of such a breach of our duty, if we carefully shun those paths which "go down to the chambers of death†;" and endeavour to convince ourselves and others, that a madness so contagious, a malady so active in the very vitals of our country, must be inflicted by the hand of God (as was that of David in the case referred to) for the punishment of some gross infringement of the great duties of religion and morality. When, therefore, we are so unhappy as actually to labour under it, the public attention should probe the latent evil, as the most pru-

* Heb. xii. 14.

† 2 Sam. i. 13, 14.

dent step towards recovering the blessings of tranquillity within our borders : and, in whatever part the offence is, whether it arises from false ambition, endless dissipation, luxurious profligacy, fickle restless dispositions, or a settled indifference to our country's or our neighbour's welfare, to exert our utmost efforts to deliver ourselves from so oppressive and sinful a bondage, and atone for it by speedy and sincere reformation.

Much instruction may be collected from a proper application of the detail transmitted to us of those confusions which cost our ancestors so much blood and treasure, and shook this noble political fabric to its basis. I fear, however, it is not uncommon to see these mortifying passages of our history consulted with the perverse intention of extracting from them hints for the advancement of such disturbances ; and from the accounts delivered of former transactions, to gather materials for the mad incendiary " in sport" to scatter, far and wide, the flames of present discord. But the wiser and juster application of such useful lessons, is that of shewing to those of our own times, by reference to the past, the duty and advantage of obedience to those governors who are not " a terror to the well-doers, " but the evil *;" and to teach all who are invested with authority, to exercise it within the bounds prescribed by religion and the laws of our country.

* Rom. xiii. 3.

Will not then such interesting events and terrible examples contribute to cool the heated imaginations of the vehement leaders in our present ruinous disturbances? It is not my intention here to follow the precedents but just condemned, and abuse your patience with entering into the merits of the question, much less to cast reflexions on any individuals. To their own master, and the collective body of the community, they must stand or fall. Even truths, which tend to irritate the minds of either party, should be laid down with the greatest caution, in a situation where moderation and mutual forbearance ought principally to be inculcated; and on a subject which furnishes ample matter for promoting christian charity, instead of recrimination and bitterness. Consistently with so justifiable an idea, it may be seasonable on this instructive and solemn anniversary, and under the dangerous circumstances which now surround this country, to pass in review before your minds the national wealth and strength converted into instruments of self-destruction; families divided among themselves; military waste and rage depopulating towns and villages; our fruitful lands and wealthy seats of comfortable industry stripped of their laborious useful hands, and well-earned gains; and the dreadful scene closed by that unparalleled murder, which astonished all Europe, and drew the tear of pity from the eyes of those genuine patriots, who first stood forth in opposition to the abuse of the prerogative. Should we

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not then maturely weigh the motives for hazarding a return of such calamities, before we determine to expose our properties, our lives, our consciences, on so perilous an adventure? Ought we not to have the fullest conviction that the hand of government is become oppressive, our grievances most urgent, the plan of despotism self-evident, the strides of popery alarming, the acts of tyranny too similar to what was then complained of, before we become abettors and encouragers of discontent attended with such general distress? It would be justly considered as an act of desperation, in the common intercourse of life, for a merchant to venture his capital not only at an unfavourable moment, but perhaps to certain loss. And, shall the happiest people on the earth, blest with a religion reasonable, charitable, and rich in the expectation of futurity; with a government equal, mild, and established on large and noble principles of freedom; with a profusion of the natural and artificial accommodations of life; protected by laws the result of consummate wisdom and long experience; administered with prudence, impartiality, and tenderness? Shall a nation so enviably circumstanced run headlong to the destruction of these blessings, as points of small value and importance? And, if not on selfish motives, or ill-considered and delusive arguments, yet, possibly, on inferior if real causes of complaint, appeal at once to the cruel and uncertain chance of war; that expedient which nothing but the last necessity can vindicate?

Let us rather, like good Christians, rational beings, and sincere lovers of our country, “ follow after the “ things that make for our peace before they be hid “ from our eyes *.” Let us seek them in a way wherein they may be found, “ by working the work of “ righteousness, the effect of which is quietness and “ assurance for ever.” And if there should be burdens imposed on any of us, too grievous to be born, the result of accidental situation, or a gradual change of circumstances, let us, by every decent and regular mode of application, solicit our relief with patience and becoming deference to the appointed guardians and legislators of this extensive empire.

Thus in the true gospel character of “ peace-makers” shall we be justly entitled to the glorious distinction and inheritance promised to the children of God. By such methods shall we disappoint the evil designs of those who endeavour to mislead us from our duty. By these we shall perpetuate and improve the civil advantages we confessedly enjoy ; avoid the repetition of the same misfortunes which afflicted our fore-fathers ; stand enrolled in the registers of fame, not only as the greatest but the wisest people : and, what is of more importance, be written in the books of heaven amongst the inheritors of a glorious and blessed immortality.

* Rom. xiv. 19.

F I N I S.



